Strategy Research Project

Countering Terrorist Recruitment Through Agile, Targeted Public Diplomacy

by

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United States Army War College
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This manuscript is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Master of Strategic Studies Degree. The views expressed in this student academic research paper are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the Department of the Army, Department of Defense, or the U.S. Government.

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

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Countering Terrorist Recruitment Through Agile, Targeted Public Diplomacy

> Public relations was invented in the United States, yet we are miserable at communicating to the rest of the world what we are about as a society and a culture . . . Speed, agility, and cultural relevance are not terms that come readily to mind when discussing U.S. strategic communications.[1]

—Robert M. Gates
Secretary of Defense

The need for a coordinated interagency approach to the threat posed by terrorist recruitment in the Islamic world existed even before the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. In February 1993, a truck bomb attack on the World Trade Center by an al-Qa'ida affiliated group killed six people and injured nearly 1,000. The Khobar Towers attack in Saudi Arabia three years later killed 19 US Air Force personnel and injured hundreds.[2] Truck bomb attacks in 1998 against the US embassies in Nairobi, Kenya, and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, killed 212 people—among them 12 Americans—and injured some 4,000. Nearly 3,000 people were killed and some 6,000 injured in the suicide attacks on New York and Washington, D.C. on September 11, 2001. Finding and neutralizing the threat posed by al-Qa'ida and other violent extremist organizations immediately became the top priority for the United States, but a complementary initiative to divide violent extremist organizations from moderate elements in Islamic societies was not undertaken. Ultimately a decade would pass before the United States established an integrated counterterrorism strategic communications initiative.[3]

In the decade after 9/11, US strategic communications[4] efforts were poorly coordinated among agencies, did not have the explicit goal of countering the actions and ideologies of violent extremist groups, and were ineffective at countering the increasingly negative image of the United States that arose during this period. Public

affairs and public diplomacy specialists at the Department of State engaged in an array of activities to promote the US image abroad, US embassies in Islamic nations focused on influencing local political and media elites, and US combatant commanders concentrated largely on local or regional initiatives to complement specific theater goals. There was no clear focus, however, on the need for an agile, coordinated, whole-of-government enterprise aimed at influencing those segments of Islamic society most vulnerable to terrorist recruitment. Violent extremist organizations, meanwhile, made deft use of the media, achieving key international successes on issues such as Abu Ghraib, Koran burnings in Afghanistan, and anti-Islamic videos in the United States.

How did it happen that despite a clear, specific, and urgent need for such an initiative, it took nearly a decade to be created? Will the recently established undertaking fall short, or are there measures—such as more robust military participation---that could make it more effective?

Strategic Tunnel Vision?

Nuclear issues apart, from the end of the Second World War until well into the Vietnam War US military strategy focused primarily on the conduct of symmetric warfare—that is, conventional military operations targeted mainly against adversaries also equipped with conventional military forces. There were several reasons for the emphasis on symmetric or conventional war—the international security climate of the Cold war made it a prudent approach under the circumstances; the complexity of conventional military operations demanded the lion's share of a commander's attention, leaving little time for peripheral or potentially unproductive lines of effort; and---unlike political-diplomatic or information aspects of war—direct accountability for conventional military operations fell exclusively on the military commander. Except for nuclear issues,

the prevailing strategic vision was a predominantly Eurocentric view influenced largely

by von Clausewitz and concentrated almost exclusively on conventional military

operations. This contributed to a focus on conventional warfare to the detriment of

wider, "asymmetric" aspects of war.[5] War in the modern era, however, is not exclusively

or even predominantly a European or a conventional military phenomenon.

Asymmetry Neglected

Strategists as ancient as Kautilya and Sun Tzu caution against too great a

reliance on the classical or overt forms of warfare. Kautilya, for example, identifies four

separate categories of warfare—diplomatic (including information efforts designed to

weaken an adversary in advance of or in lieu of military operations), open warfare (by

which is meant classical or conventional warfare), irregular or guerrilla warfare (the war

of the weak against the strong), and secret warfare (a term that encompasses a range

of covert activities including terror and assassination).[6] Multiple types of warfare can

occur simultaneously or transmute from one form to another at the discretion of one of

the adversaries.

Despite such alternatives, the focus of US military operations from the Second

World War to the present has been on conventional (symmetric) operations.

Asymmetric aspects of warfare came to the fore only twice: during the Vietnam War, as

it gradually became clear that conventional military operations would be ineffective

against a determined adversary skilled in irregular and diplomatic-political aspects of

war; and again during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, when US overreliance on

conventional operations left commanders ill-equipped to cope with follow-on insurgency

and terrorism. In both cases, US commanders ultimately reacted by establishing

counterinsurgency and pacification doctrines and improved procedures for countering

terrorist attacks. Little effort, if any, was devoted to the diplomatic and political aspects of war mentioned by Kautilya—activity short of combat that encompasses diplomatic measures, open information (both gathered and disseminated) and actions aimed at either weakening a potential adversary or inducing him to change his behavior.

In Vietnam, US recognition that conventional military operations alone would be insufficient to achieve victory came late. The miscalculation was highlighted in an exchange between US Army Colonel Harry Summers and a senior North Vietnamese Army (NVA) officer, Colonel Tu, in 1975. Colonel Summers declared that the NVA had never defeated US forces on the battlefield, to which Colonel Tu replied, "That may be true . . . but it is also irrelevant."[7] North Vietnamese commanders had long since recognized that the crucial "center of gravity" of the conflict was not Vietnam, but America—specifically, in the faltering willingness of the American public to continue to prosecute the war. Success in that remote venue meant victory, even if triumph on the physical battlefield remained elusive. North Vietnam's diligent, effective messaging (abetted by a badly miscalculated US overreliance on the draft that severely undercut popular support for the war) ultimately prevailed, despite successive US tactical victories.

<center>The Uncontested Battlefield</center>

In Iraq, the US once again failed to grasp early on the importance of asymmetric operations and the crucial value of ideas in war. American commanders like General Odierno at first focused almost exclusively on the conventional campaign:

When we first went there, we thought we would have a conventional fight. We had a conventional fight which turned into an insurgency that was compounded by terrorism ….We were surprised by the changing tactics that we saw. We had no idea about the irregular aspect we were about to face. We didn't recognize this was a possibility. And when we did recognize this, it took us too long to adjust.[8]

To some extent, the surprise is understandable. Modern warfare is complex. It can involve air, sea, land, space, and cyberspace domains; training, operations, procurement, and sustainment activity; joint, interagency, intergovernmental, and multinational coordination; and regular, reserve, National Guard, Allied, and partner forces. The primary task of a commander—the one for which he will be held uniquely accountable—is to meld these diverse elements into an effective military enterprise for the conduct of land warfare. It is unsurprising that he would concentrate on this task.

Yet if his political and strategic goals are to be achieved, military operations cannot be his only task. Even at the height of planning, preparation, and execution of complex combat operations, a commander must remain alert for a range of threats *other* than the conventional combat capability of his adversary. Not all threats to conventional forces, after all, are conventional in nature. Irregular, terrorist, political, and informational activities can undermine a commander's aims just as effectively as the conventional capabilities of his adversary. In some cases, they can be the difference between victory and defeat.

A US officer who had served in Iraq recently noted the importance of asymmetric warfare and the associated "war of ideas":

We plan kinetic campaigns and maybe consider adding a public affairs annex. Our adversaries plan information campaigns that exploit kinetic events, especially spectacular attacks and martyrdom operations. We aren't even on the playing field, but al-Qa'ida seeks to dominate it because they know their war will be won by ideas.[9]

As the adversary's tactics changed, US commanders in Iraq and Afghanistan developed tactics and doctrine in response to the challenges of irregular warfare and terrorist threats. Regarding information initiatives, however—a central element of the "diplomatic warfare" mentioned by Kautilya—there was scant mention, leaving this key area of conflict perilously uncontested. This is ironic considering that America's greatest defeat in Iraq arguably was not on the physical battlefield, but at Abu Ghraib. There, irrefutable evidence of systematic US mistreatment of prisoners provoked a wave of international revulsion and caused a surge of terrorist recruitment that continued for years.[10]

Despite these setbacks, US policymakers neither planned nor acted as if they were aware that a crucial struggle for domestic and international public opinion was even taking place. Senior military leaders remained focused on the fight they could see—conventional and counterinsurgency operations, and local information operations to support them—and diplomats concentrated on engagement with international counterparts and local elites. When the inevitable surprise occurred—Tet or My Lai for Vietnam, Abu Ghraib for Iraq, Koran burnings for Afghanistan—there was no organized, effectively staffed interagency entity available to direct a quick, clear, definitive response to the audiences that mattered most. The adversary was able to respond with quick, agile, persuasive messages that damaged US interests and that remained largely uncontested. Violent extremist organizations with scant resources and far less experience have consistently outperformed the US in recent years in the struggle for domestic and international public opinion. It is incomprehensible that America, whose ideas are fundamentally more sound, should continue to express them so ineffectively.

Despite successive attempts at reorganization for over a decade, however, it has only been in the last few years that the US has begun to recover.

Design: An Elusive Goal

Traditionally, the United States has marshaled its resources relatively quickly and effectively to make its case before the world. In both world wars, the US initiated wide-ranging information enterprises to mobilize international opinion against imperial and then fascist Germany. During the Cold War, ventures such as Radio Free Europe and the Voice of America disseminated US views worldwide. Only as US actions gradually became more questionable—during the Vietnam War, for example, or the war in Iraq—did the effectiveness of public diplomacy rapidly diminish.

The current challenge is not that US policy is defective, however, but that the audience is unfamiliar, the adversary elusive, and the technology in a constant state of flux. Historical precedents can inform the US approach to the issue, but should not be accepted uncritically as a model or template. What works should be kept, but new challenges will require a new approach. Some familiarity with past experiences, however, can be helpful in shaping future efforts.

For most of the postwar period, from 1953 to 1999, US public diplomacy was centered in a single organization, the United States Information Agency (USIA). The high point of that agency—at least in terms of organization, leadership, and prestige—began in 1961, when President Kennedy asked the renowned broadcast journalist Edward R. Murrow to become USIA's Director. Murrow agreed reluctantly, on condition that he would be given frequent Presidential access and would be consulted when decisions were made:

As Murrow saw it, the important thing was not that the USIA Director, as a member of the National Security Council, should argue for or against policy on psychological grounds. It was that he should be informed in advance of policies in the making and take part in their formulation. As he frequently stated it, the USIA should be "in on the take-offs, and not just the crash landings," like that of the U-2 spy plane shot down in Siberia. [11]

Though sound in theory, this arrangement did not work well in practice. Murrow was suffering from early effects of cancer when the Bay of Pigs operation was being planned---when it failed, the USIA labored in vain to contain the damage. The USIA was also ineffective when tasked with promoting the South Vietnamese government of Ngo Dinh Diem to journalists as popular domestically, when Murrow and others knew this to be false. This underscores a fundamental conflict that can arise between policy and strategic communication—no amount of expert messaging can rescue a policy that is inherently flawed. As Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mullen explained in 2009:

> . . . most strategic communication problems are not communication problems at all. They are policy and execution problems. Each time we fail to live up to our values or don't follow up on a promise, we look more and more like the arrogant Americans the enemy claims we are. [12]

This problem is compounded when, as often happens, senior policymakers exclude key communications leaders from sensitive policy decisions until it is too late for their advice to be effective.

One interagency public diplomacy initiative that achieved some success, however, was the Active Measures Working Group, created by the Reagan administration in 1981 to counter Soviet disinformation and forgery. [13] This integrated interagency working group used information from State and USIA posts around the world, intelligence reporting, and FBI investigations to produce unclassified articles and reports exposing Soviet active measures and deceit. [14] Chaired by the Department of

State and directed by the National Security Council staff, the group had broad inter-departmental participation—from State, USIA, the Departments of Defense and Justice, and the intelligence community. Central to the group's success was continued high-level support from senior officials in the National Security Council staff, the Department of State, and the intelligence community.[15] The Working Group was disestablished in 1991, two years after the collapse of the Soviet Union. It serves even now as a textbook example of an innovative, task-oriented, interagency public diplomacy enterprise.

Inauspicious Beginnings

The USIA was disestablished in 1999 under the Clinton administration, after which its public diplomacy functions were transferred to the newly created Office of the Under Secretary of State for Public Affairs and Public Diplomacy. Effectiveness did not improve, and informed commentators noted that US agencies floundered in their initial efforts to organize a strategic communications campaign.[16] The Bush administration sought to improve the situation by creating the Office of Global Communications in 2003, but the new entity was ineffective and "soon faded into the background as a minor office within the National Security Staff."[17] Leadership faltered at State too, as the key post of Under Secretary of State for Public Affairs and Public Diplomacy went unfilled for 30 percent of the time and when filled, was occupied by a revolving door of various incumbents.[18] Strategic communication as a specific function languished at Defense as well, as demonstrated when the position of Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Support to Public Diplomacy—in place since 2007—was disestablished in March 2009 and the function downgraded to a Senior Advisor.[19]

By early 2012, public diplomacy in general was viewed by knowledgeable critics

as undeservedly neglected:

> The U.S. government's public diplomacy institutions are running on autopilot. While other nations, such as China, are ramping up public diplomacy and soft-power capabilities, the attention of the political leaders in this country is focused elsewhere: the budget deficit, the economy, the presidential election, etc. The effect is that the people who should be advocating for the importance of public diplomacy and think about its strategic role in U.S. foreign policy are simply not in place, so much-needed leadership in this area is lacking.[20]

Breaking the Logjam

In the specific realm of counterterrorist messaging, however, the news was not

so bleak. In 2007, a modest effort was initiated at State to focus on using public

diplomacy to counter the activities and ideology of violent extremist groups. A small

interagency Counterterrorism Communications Center (CTCC) was established to

coordinate overall US strategic messaging for use by some 2,000 US government

communicators to combat terrorist ideology and underscore its destructive effects. The

effort was augmented by a miniscule Digital Outreach Team that—although the work

was described as labor-intensive—employed only two Arabic speakers in 2007 to post

entries on influential Arabic-language blogs and websites.[21] This meager allocation of

resources was clearly disproportionate to the scope and importance of the task, but at

least it was a beginning. Traditional public diplomacy efforts, including websites in

Arabic and Farsi, continued under State's Bureau of International Information

Programs.[22]

Momentum Builds

In February and March 2010, three major policy documents on strategic communications and public diplomacy were issued pursuant to Section 1055 of the Duncan Hunter National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2009:

- The National Security Council's *National Strategy for Strategic Communication*,

- The Department of Defense's *Report on Strategic Communication*, and

- The State Department's roadmap *U.S. Public Diplomacy: Strengthening U.S. Engagement with the World*

The first two were conspicuously thin on substance—neither mentioned a role for strategic communications as a means to counter terrorism. This, despite prioritization of this issue having been a requirement for the NSC report as specified in Section 1055.

Only the State roadmap contained much of real substance. First, State directed that six new Deputy Assistant Secretaries of State for Public Diplomacy be created, to be placed in the Department's regional bureaus. These positions were quickly filled. While this cosmetic change was unlikely to have any substantive or lasting effect, the measure increased the visibility of public diplomacy in the geographic bureaus and established highly visible points of contact for public diplomacy conveniently across the organization.

The State roadmap also identified combating violent extremism as one of the five "key strategic imperatives" for 21st century public diplomacy. This goal was to be pursued by rapid response to extremist messages, combating extremist misinformation, impeding extremists' ability to recruit, and empowering credible voices in Islamic societies to undermine violent extremists' messages.[23]

Informed critics at the time were not overly impressed with the new "strategic overview," as too many fundamental problems remained unaddressed:

> State Department's record as the lead agency on public diplomacy hardly inspires great confidence. Foggy Bottom harbors an institutional bias against soft power and does not have the authority to command other U.S. government agencies to coordinate public diplomacy efforts. The Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy does not have the necessary budgetary and line authority. And at the NSC, where the interagency coordination ultimately takes place, there is insufficient staffing for such an initiative.[24]

Perhaps to address these shortcomings, particularly with regard to counterterrorism, the Obama administration in September 2011 issued Executive Order 13584, *Developing an Integrated Strategic Counterterrorism Communications Initiative* that established a new Center for Strategic Counterterrorism Communications (CSCC) to replace the earlier, more modest Counterterrorism Communications Center (CTCC). The new Center was to "…coordinate, orient, and inform Government-wide public communications activities directed at audiences abroad and targeted against violent extremists and terrorist organizations."[25]

It was directed to coordinate its analysis, evaluation, and planning functions with the National Counterterrorism Center (NCTC) and with other agencies as appropriate.[26] Among the new Center's specific duties were to monitor and evaluate narratives and events abroad that could help to develop US strategic counterterrorism narratives and communications strategies, to identify trends in extremist communications and to facilitate the use of a wide range of communications technologies by the US, including digital tools.[27] A Steering Committee to coordinate these efforts was established that would meet at least once every six months.

The executive order also established a new Counterterrorism Communications Support Office (CCSO) to support agencies in implementing whole-of-government public communications activities directed at audiences abroad. The CCSO was to develop expertise and studies on aspirations, narratives, and information strategies and tactics of violent extremists and terrorist organizations overseas and to develop expertise on implementing highly focused social media campaigns.[28]

This 2011 initiative was a significant advance on its predecessors. By directing close coordination with the National Counterterrorism Center, the executive order mandates at least one key aspect of interagency coordination. Coordination with other agencies of government, however, is authorized but not mandated and the exact nature and extent of uniformed service participation in the new enterprise is not clear.

What Is the Military's Role?

The 2011 executive order only vaguely defines the military's role, which leaves the uniformed services apparently free to exercise broad discretion in the extent to which they choose to participate. One approach—perhaps the reflexive one—would be to regard "public diplomacy" as a tasking for diplomats, not soldiers. Is there a case for military support for such an effort, particularly at a time when military manpower and acquisitions are being severely reduced?

Threat to the US

Terrorism is a real and present danger to the United States, its citizens, its allies, and its interests worldwide. Countering violent extremism is the primary national military objective specified in the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs' *National Military Strategy*, the Secretary of Defense's *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense,* and the *Quadrennial Defense Review*.[29]

<u>Threat to Military Personnel, Combatant Commands</u>

Even as US forces draw down from combat deployments, terrorism and violent extremism remain threats to US forces. Military personnel are present at US embassies, on training exercises, and in partnership activities throughout the world, and they are potentially always at risk. Measures that weaken terrorist recruitment and undermine violent extremist ideology, even if they do so indirectly, can enhance the security of US service members worldwide.

The issue affects all Combatant Commands. Withdrawal of US forces from the CENTCOM area of responsibility will reduce their vulnerability to attack, but mean that US forces will no longer be in contact to influence events on the ground. The strategic shift to the PACOM area of responsibility will mean that cooperative relations with regional states—among them Indonesia, the country with the world's largest Islamic population—will grow in importance. Strategic communication offers a low-profile method of engagement with minimal presence and little cost. Large Islamic populations in the EUCOM area make strategic communication an important issue there as well. Countering violent extremist organizations using traditional and non-traditional means therefore is a key objective for all combatant commands.

<u>Leveraging Resources: Lower Cost, Smaller Footprint</u>

An advantage of participating in an interagency initiative is the possibility to leverage the resources of other organizations to contribute to military-specific objectives. This will be increasingly important in times of austerity.

In the past, one obstacle to establishing whole-of-government information campaigns has been that public diplomacy has been regarded as a function for diplomats rather than the uniformed military. Diplomacy aimed at separating violent

extremist groups like al-Qa'ida from the Islamic societies in which they operate and from which they intend to recruit is a separate issue, and one directly in line with the priority military objective, to counter violent extremist organizations. Particularly if one uses a "virtual" task force (see below), the cost of augmenting the military's contribution to this State-led initiative may be minimal.

Retention of Key Skills: Long-Lead Military Occupational Specialties

Active participation in this counterterrorism initiative offers the opportunity not only to pursue the primary national security objective at a time when US military forces are unlikely to be in contact, but affords skilled personnel who have long-lead military occupational specialists such as linguists and regional experts an opportunity to maintain or improve their professional skills by working alongside native speakers on a critical national issue rather than by classroom study or temporary duty assignment.

Whole-of-Government Effort

Participation in an interagency initiative can provide valuable national-level experience for the next generation of military commanders. The experiences are valuable in themselves and can lead to the development of key interagency contacts that can later be useful on other priority projects.

Opportunity for Dynamic Cooperation with Close Allies

Because the activities and materials used in strategic communications are unclassified, cooperation with close allies on strategic communications is a realistic option. The British in particular have a long and distinguished record of participation in strategic communications initiatives.

While not a combat activity, strategic communications to counter terrorist recruitment and ideology may nonetheless achieve some of the same political ends as

combat, but without fighting. Sun Tzu's observation that "Supreme excellence is not to be victorious in every battle, but to conquer one's enemy without fighting" is particularly relevant to such a "war of ideas."[30] Success achieved through persuasion is preferable to battlefield victory and is achieved at less cost.

Message and Medium

Although message and medium are both essential in strategic communication, producing an effective message is the primary task. Conceiving and perfecting messages for an international audience can be difficult. It is critical for them to be designed with the particular audience—its concerns, sensitivities, and culture— considered and thoroughly understood. Words matter, particularly when addressed to an audience in a different culture where words and their nuances may be understood differently.

When addressing messages to an Islamic audience, it is essential to know the traditional meanings of Islamic terms. Expressions such as "Jihadist," "Islamist," or "Sharia law" may have different, and in some cases positive, connotations for an Islamic audience as opposed to a Western one. An effective message should reflect careful consideration of how such words are used, and whether they should be used sparingly or at all. Messages that emphasize objectionable or unwelcome activities of violent extremist groups, such as involvement in criminal activities, the drug trade, or violence and cruelty to civilians, may be more effective.

Narrative Example

In early October 2012, a teenage Pakistani girl, Malala Yousafzai, was seized from her school bus and shot by the Taliban, sustaining serious head injuries. She had been targeted because of her outspoken commitment to the cause of women's

education. International publicity, while widespread, reported the facts of the case but not the extent to which such an act contravened Islamic principles—in particular Surah 4:128 of the Koran and in the Prophet's Final Sermon at Ararat, in which he ordered Muslim men to be kind and respectful toward women. [31] Themes such as this may not occur often, but could be used to highlight contradictions between extremists' views and the views of Islamic communities or scholars.

Speed and agility are also key features of effective public diplomacy. The ability to respond to developments promptly, if possible within a single 24-hour news cycle, can be crucial.

Finding the appropriate medium—including nontraditional media such as blogs, web pages, texting, social media, and tweets—can be an additional challenge, and in some cases may be the most difficult part of strategic communications. Identification of websites or specific social media that violent extremists may be using can pose a particularly difficult challenge.

Options for Participation

The uniformed services have several options in the face of the 2011 interagency initiative to counter violent extremism through public diplomacy. They can keep the same level of effort as at present; they can increase the number of personnel they assign to participate in the State-led effort; or they can further support the effort through a "virtual" task force that would receive and prioritize tasking from the CSCC or CCSO, but whose members would remain in their usual workspaces.

The first option, the status quo, would require no effort to implement but likewise would bring about no real change. Response to adverse incidents may be sporadic and inconsistent, with combatant commanders, for example, responding to incidents in their

area of responsibility, and statements from diplomatic sources available to Western media, but with timely, coordinated responses specifically tailored to appeal to populations in Islamic countries—or to Islamic populations in the West—prepared and delivered less quickly than would be possible with military augmentation..

The second option, increasing the number of military personnel assigned to the State-led effort, would be the most effective option in the long run, but may not be viable because of resource constraints.

The third option, establishing a virtual task force that could respond to tasking from the State-led CSCC and CCSO but without reassigning personnel, would involve minimal investment of resources but provide the interagency with the opportunity to task key Defense Department specialists. These could include linguists, foreign area specialists, public affairs and psychological operations personnel, and even Islamic military chaplains. The participants would remain in their normal places of duty but supervisors would commit to priority being given to any high-priority tasking from the State-led Center or Office. It should be underscored that the initiative itself is an open public diplomacy effort rather than psychological operations or some kind of active measure.

<center>Risks and Challenges</center>

As with the Active Measures Working Group mentioned previously, a key challenge in establishing and operating an interagency effort of this scope is the strong leadership required at the working level and the need for dedicated high-level support from senior levels—from the National Security Council, the Department of State, and Department of Defense in particular. New working relationships across institutional boundaries are always susceptible to bureaucratic inertia, political infighting, or

<center>18</center>

dissension over turf. Care, sensitivity, and strong, committed leadership will be

essential to ensuring an effective operating environment—particularly if it involves the

establishment of a "virtual" task force. Francis Bacon wrote, "Things alter for the worse

spontaneously, if they be not altered for the better designedly."[32] Risks are likely to be

greater for inaction than action. Although the US has achieved success thus far in

kinetic operations against violent extremist organizations, organizations adapt, and past

success is no guarantee for the future. Striking a terrorist after he has been trained,

indoctrinated, and briefed is like waiting to deflect an arrow instead of fighting to take

away the bow. The weapon in this case *is* the terrorist (in some cases, quite literally),

and moving against its origin—that is, recruitment—can be as important as moving

against the end result.

Measuring Success

One drawback to strategic communications is the difficulty of measuring

"success." Polls and surveys can provide information, but it can be unreliable.   The

results, moreover, may not be able to isolate individual factors to which the target

audience is responding. Because the goals of this undertaking are long-term, they may

be reflected only superficially in short-term metrics. There may thus be challenges in

responding to oversight groups, such as Congress, that are intent on quantifying the

results of strategic communications or public diplomacy initiatives.

Sensitivity over Religious Messaging?

There may be some resistance to the use of religious themes in messaging.

Violent extremist, insurgent, and even terrorist groups, however, rely substantially for

their authority on adherence to religious doctrine, so conspicuous discrepancies

between their actions and the theological basis they cite for their authority are justified,

as in the narrative example cited above. Care should be taken that any message with religious overtones accurately reflects the customary religious interpretation.

Adversaries and Their Vulnerabilities

Targets of the present strategic communications campaign are the violent extremist organizations that the CSCC and CCSO are targeting—al-Qa'ida and its affiliates in Iraq, the Islamic Maghreb, and the Arabian Peninsula; the Taliban in Afghanistan and Pakistan (although not presently on the list of terrorist organizations); Boko Haram, Lashkar-e-Tayyiba, Jemaah Islamiya, al-Shabaab, the Haqqani Network, Hezb-e-Islami, Ansaru, and Ansar Dine, among others. Messages focusing on criminal or violent offenses carried out by these organizations or their cruelty to the local population can be effective, but contradictions between their actions and the religious tenets they claim to uphold, may also be highlighted.

Division of violent terrorist organizations from the Islamic societies and communities in which they operate is a key goal; a subsidiary one is to induce such groups to change their behavior. Documentary evidence left behind by violent extremist organizations in Mali demonstrates that popular opinion can have a moderating effect on the behavior of such organizations, if only by forcing them to choose between altering their behavior or losing local popular support.

Conclusion

Aldous Huxley opined, "That men do not learn very much from the lessons of history is the most important of all the lessons that history has to teach."[33] The initiation of a coordinated interagency public diplomacy initiative aimed at countering terrorist recruitment, actions, and ideology after a delay of ten years presents an opportunity for the uniformed services to pursue the foremost national security

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objective even as they draw down their forces from direct contact with adversaries overseas. That the area of conflict is a war of ideas rather than a physical battlefield is a challenge that can be overcome. The opportunities for specialists—in languages, foreign cultures, and religious practices to mention a few—to continue to develop their skills even as they contribute to addressing the nation's foremost national security objective should be more than enough incentive for uniformed services to participate avidly in the developing State-led interagency effort. That the new front line is not geographic but in the "terrain of the mind" will require adjustments and new ways of thinking, but flexibility and adaptability are traditional features of the American way of war.

The principal danger in the present circumstance is that military leaders will revert to old habits and fail to grasp the opportunities presented by this new but unfamiliar enterprise. Just as in much of the period following the Second World War, military commanders may become fixated on the details of their profession; the complexity of managing a shrinking force; and the ends, ways, and means of conventional force planning. If unwelcome surprises are to be avoided, military leaders will need to focus on more than the immediate requirements of conventional operations, and bear in mind that any one of the types of warfare envisioned by Kautilya can take place at any time. With the withdrawal of US combat forces from Iraq and Afghanistan, strategic communication offers one of the few methods other than special operations to counter terrorists, diminish their recruiting efforts, and influence the societies in which they operate. Strategic communications and public diplomacy offer an effective whole-of-government approach to counterterrorism that warrants robust military support.

[1] Robert M. Gates, Landon Lecture, Kansas State University, Remarks as Delivered by Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates, Manhattan, Kansas, Monday, November 26, 2007. http://www.defense.gov/Speeches/Speech.aspx?SpeechID=1199.

[2] If it were not for the vigilance and alert response of Air Force Staff Sergeant Alfredo R. Guerrero, who observed the activity around the truck, reported it to security as an imminent threat, and began a floor-by-floor evacuation of the building almost immediately through the sturdily constructed stairwell at the rear of the building, the death toll would have been far higher.

[3] Executive Order 13584, "Developing an Integrated Strategic Counterterrorism Communications Initiative," September 9, 2011, available at http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/09/09/executive-order-developing-integrated-strategic-counterterrorism-communi.

[4] Although officially superseded by the equivocal expression, "communications synchronization," the term "strategic communications" is used here as the traditional US military equivalent for what is otherwise referred to as public diplomacy. Neither term is satisfactory, as "public diplomacy" suggests an activity that is primarily diplomatic in nature, whereas strategic communications could be understood as referring to internal communications rather than as efforts to make US views known to foreign audiences. The lack of a single, clear term is unfortunate, as public diplomacy or strategic communications, to be effective, must be a whole-of-government undertaking.

[5] Von Clausewitz denies, almost contemptuously, the possibility that there may be elements of strategy unrelated to combat: "Strategy is concerned exclusively with combat and how it is directed. Unlike other areas of life, it does not consist of actions made up only of words, such as statements, declarations, and so forth. Words, being cheap, are the principal means used by the clever to deceive." *On War,* Book 3, Chapter 10 "Deception." (Author's translation from the German: "Die Strategie kennt keine andere Taetigkeit als die Anordnung der Gefechte mit den Massregeln, die sich darauf beziehen. Sie kennt nicht, wie das uebrige Leben, Handlungen, die in blossen Worten, d. h. in Auesserungen, Erklaerungen usw. bestehen. Diese, die nicht viel kosten, sind es aber vorzueglich, womit der Listige hinters Licht führt." *Vom Kriege,* Drittes Buch, Zehntes Kapitel, "Die List" Carl von Clausewitz, *Vom Kriege, (Berlin:* Duemmlers Verlag, 1832)). http://www.clausewitz.com/readings/VomKriege1832/TOC.htm

In this respect, von Clausewitz is very much a product of his time and place, whereas non-European strategists like Sun Tzu and Kautilya offer strategic insights that are virtually timeless. Sun Tzu singles out deception as a key element of warfare and identifies subduing the enemy without fighting as the supreme achievement of the strategic art. Von Clausewitz, on the other hand, dismisses deception as having little strategic value and maintains that the concept of strategy outside the context of military combat is meaningless. (Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. Michael Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976), 202-203.)

[6] Kautilya, *The Arthashastra*, (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1992), 636.

[7] Harry G. Summers, Jr. *On Strategy: A Critical Analysis of the Vietnam War* (Novato, California: Presidio Press, 1982), 1.

[8] General Raymond Odierno, "A Tested Top Warrior," *Army Times,* September 19, 2011, 20.

[9] As cited in Richard Halloran, "Strategic Communications," *Parameters,* U.S. Army War College, Autumn 2007, 4.

[10] Ironically, the classical Indian strategist Kautilya not only envisions prisoner mistreatment as a potential danger for the commander but stipulates detailed, specific—and in some cases very harsh--- punishments for jailers who torture or mistreat prisoners without authorization. (Kautilya, *The Arthashastra*, (New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1992), 452-455.)

[11] Alexander Kendrick, *Prime Time: The Life of Edward R. Murrow,* (New York: Little, Brown,1969) 456.

[12] Michael G. Mullen, Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, "Strategic Communication: Getting Back to Basics," *Joint Forces Quarterly,* Issue 55, 4th Quarter 2009, 4.

[13] Incredibly, the US did not routinely counter Soviet active measures before the establishment of the Active Measures Working Group in 1981. It had no organized entity to do so, despite aggressive Soviet use of forgeries, disinformation, and agents of influence against the United States throughout the period of the Cold War. The US did occasionally expose individual disinformation and forgeries attempts, but these were episodic incidents and not part of a systematic or organized process.

[14] Herbert Romerstein, "The Interagency Active Measures Working Group: An Eyewitness Account of US Counterpropaganda Strategy" (2006) in J. Michael Waller, *The Public Diplomacy Reader,* (Washington, D.C., Institute of World Politics Press, 2007), 352.

[15] Ibid., 353.

[16] Halloran, 2.

[17] Ibid.

[18] Four separate incumbents in the Bush administration alone (not including gaps). Helle C. Dale, "Fill the Public Diplomacy Leadership Vacuum," Heritage Foundation WebMemo, February 3, 2012. http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2012/02/fill-the-public-diplomacy-leadership-vacuum.

[19] Robert Gates, *Department of Defense Report on Strategic Communication, December 2009*, (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, February 11, 2010), 6.

[20] Dale, "Fill the Public Diplomacy Leadership Vacuum."

[21] Duncan MacInnes, Principal Deputy Coordinator, Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State, "Strategic Communication and Countering Ideological

Support for Terrorism," Testimony before the U.S. House Committee on Armed Services, Subcommittee on Terrorism and Unconventional Threats, November 15, 2007, 3-5.

[22] Ibid.

[23] Judith McHale, Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy and Public Affairs, *Public Diplomacy: Strengthening US Engagement with the World,* (Washington, D.C: U.S. Department of State, March 2010), 16.

[24] Helle C. Dale, "Public Diplomacy and Strategic Communications Review: Key Issues for Congressional Oversight," Heritage Foundation WebMemo, March 22, 2010. http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2010/03/public-diplomacy-and-strategic-communications-review-key-issues-for-congressional-oversight.

[25] EO 13584.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid.

[28] Ibid.

[29] Admiral Michael G. Mullen, *National Military Strategy*, (Washington, D.C.: Chairman, Joint Chiefs of Staff, February 2011), 20; Leon Panetta, *Sustaining U.S. Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense*, (Washington, D.C., U.S. Department of Defense, January 2012), 32; Robert M. Gates, *Quadrennial Defense Review,* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense), passim.

[30] A variation of Sun Tzu, *On the Art of War*, trans. Lionel Giles (London: The British Museum, 1910), 17.

[31] A popular English translation of Surah 4:128 reads ". . . if ye be kind towards women and fear to wrong them, God is well acquainted with what you do." A more literal translation does not reflect a specific reference to women, but as the entirety of Surah 4 is concerned with the role of women in Islam, the translation may address the point more comprehensively than it may first appear.

[32] Francis Bacon, *The Essays,* (Minneola, New York: Dover Press, 2008), 74.

[33] Aldous Huxley, "Case of Voluntary Ignorance," *Collected Essays* (New York: Bantam Books, 1964), 123.